

As our Founding Fathers recognized, the strength of this great Nation derives from the tolerance we espouse. America builds strength from its diversity. I am proud to be a part of a country where every person may practice their religious beliefs without fear. At a time when religious differences are igniting conflicts throughout the world, America serves as a beacon of hope that religious tolerance is not only achievable, but only serves to make a country stronger and more viable.

The Islamic faith follows the lunar calendar. During the ninth month of the lunar calendar, called "Ramadan," the Arabic term for intense heat and scorched earth, Muslims throughout the world celebrate the revelation of the Quran. In 2007, the month of Ramadan lasts from September 13 to October 12. This sacred month is observed with prayers, fasting, and charity.

I believe we could all use a time of peace and reflection. Ramadan embodies these principles, and I applaud our Muslim friends and neighbors for their sincere religious beliefs.

I encourage my colleagues to support this resolution.

Mr. SHERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. SHERMAN) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the resolution, H. Res. 635, as amended.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the yeas have it.

Mr. SHERMAN. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

RECOGNIZING THAT VIOLENCE POSES AN INCREASINGLY SERIOUS THREAT TO PEACE AND STABILITY IN CENTRAL AMERICA

Mr. SHERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the resolution (H. Res. 564) recognizing that violence poses an increasingly serious threat to peace and stability in Central America and supporting expanded cooperation between the United States and the countries of Central America to combat crime and violence, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the resolution.

The text of the resolution is as follows:

H. RES. 564

Whereas murder rates have been increasing throughout Central America in recent years;

Whereas in 2005, the estimated murder rate per 100,000 people was roughly 56 in El Salvador, 41 in Honduras, and 38 in Guatemala;

Whereas the February 2007 murder of 3 Salvadoran legislators from the Central American parliament and the subsequent murder in prison of the Guatemalan policemen

linked to the crime clearly illustrated to the international community the threat posed by violence in Central America;

Whereas a May 2007 report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) makes the case that Central American countries are particularly vulnerable to violent crimes fueled by drug trafficking and corruption because they are geographically located between the world's largest drug producing and drug consuming countries;

Whereas 90 percent of the cocaine shipped from the Andes to the United States flows through Central America and thus contributes to increased violence on the Central American isthmus;

Whereas Central American governments and United States officials have attributed a large proportion of the rise in violent crime in Central America to youth gangs, many of which have ties to the United States;

Whereas UNODC estimates that there are 69,145 gang members in Central America;

Whereas on June 7, 2005, the Organization of American States (OAS) passed a resolution to urge member states to support the creation of holistic solutions to the gang problem;

Whereas Guatemala has experienced a surge in female murders during the past 3 years, with many of those murders allegedly committed by drug traffickers and other organized criminal groups;

Whereas violence between partners, particularly violence by men against their wives or girlfriends, is widespread in Central America and an International Violence Against Women Survey comparing selected countries in Africa, Latin America, Europe, and Asia found that 60 percent of women in Costa Rica—often considered the least violent country in Central America—reported having experienced domestic violence during their lives;

Whereas the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere held a briefing and hearing on June 26, 2007, on violence in Central America;

Whereas the Guatemalan government and the United Nations signed a groundbreaking agreement in December 2006 to establish the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) which was approved by the country's legislature on August 1, 2007;

Whereas the Central American Integration System (SICA) is an inter-governmental organization formed in 1991 comprised of the following member states: Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama;

Whereas the Dominican Republic participates in SICA as an Associate Member State;

Whereas SICA and the United States held their first ever Dialogue on Democratic Security in Guatemala City from July 16 through 18, 2007, which focused on gangs, drug trafficking, and arms trafficking;

Whereas SICA and the United States signed an agreement at this meeting to improve intelligence sharing and policing and to institutionalize dialogue on regional security;

Whereas this meeting was the first time in almost a quarter century that high level officials from the United States and all 7 Central American countries and the Dominican Republic have met formally to discuss security issues;

Whereas United States Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Thomas Shannon announced at this meeting the United States Strategy to Combat Criminal Gangs from Central America and Mexico designed to prevent youth from entering gangs and strengthen the fight against gang-related violence and other crimes;

Whereas Assistant Secretary Shannon recognized at this meeting that youth gang de-

linquency "has profound social roots and our way of fighting it cannot only be through policing";

Whereas the United States pledged \$1,000,000 at this meeting to help Central American governments draft a regional strategy to fight youth gangs and drug trafficking and \$3,000,000 to fund rehabilitation programs for youths in gangs; and

Whereas an enhanced political commitment and cooperation between the United States and Central America on security issues can help curb violence in Central America: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That it is the sense of the House of Representatives that—

(1) crime and violence pose an increasingly serious threat to peace and stability in Central America;

(2) officials from Central America and the United States should be commended for holding a historic meeting to discuss regional security strategies;

(3) the announcement on July 18, 2007, of the United States Strategy to Combat Criminal Gangs from Central America and Mexico should be commended;

(4) the President of the United States should follow through on commitments made in the United States Strategy to Combat Criminal Gangs from Central America and Mexico with concrete actions;

(5) the commitment of funds by the United States to fight youth gangs in Central America is an important step forward and greater resources should be considered in the future to fight this problem due to its severity and its transnational nature; and

(6) Central American and United States officials should be encouraged to meet on a regular basis to further cooperation in combating crime and violence in Central America.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. SHERMAN) and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. POE) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. SHERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the resolution under consideration.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from California?

There was no objection.

Mr. SHERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of this resolution and yield myself as much time as I may consume.

I want to thank our colleagues, Congressman ELIOT ENGEL and DAN BURTON, the Chair and ranking member respectively of the Western Hemisphere Subcommittee, for introducing this important legislation.

The measure brings a long overdue spotlight to the serious and growing problem of violence in Central America. The February murder of three Salvadoran legislators and the subsequent shocking murder in prison of the Guatemalan policeman linked to the crime illustrate the very real daily threat posed by violence in this region.

While this high-profile incident brought violence into the spotlight, it is unfortunately nothing new. In recent

years, murder rates have been increasing throughout Central America. In 2005, the estimated murder rate per 100,000 people was roughly 56 in El Salvador, 41 in Honduras, and 38 in Guatemala. These rates are extraordinarily high by international standards.

Much of the violence in Central America is closely related to drug trafficking. A report released by the United Nations in May argues that Central American countries are particularly vulnerable to violent crimes, fueled by drug trafficking, because they are geographically located between South America and the United States; in other words, between the world's largest drug-producing and the world's largest drug-consuming countries or areas. In fact, 90 percent of the cocaine shipped from the Andean region to the United States flows through Central America. This clearly plays a major role in triggering violence in the region.

If drugs are the primary factor in the scourge of violence, youth gangs are a close second. There's estimated to be about 70,000 youth gang members in Central America. Many of these gangs have ties to the United States and pose threats to security in our own communities.

□ 1145

We are beginning to address this violence crisis. The United States and Central American officials have started to work together to combat violence in Central America, but more needs to be done. This July, high-level officials from the United States and all seven Central American countries met to discuss security in the region, particularly addressing gangs, drug trafficking and arms trafficking. This meeting marked the first time in almost a quarter century that high-level officials from the United States and all the countries of Central America met formally to discuss security issues.

At the meeting, the State Department announced the U.S. strategy to combat criminal gangs from Central America and Mexico and pledged \$4 million to help Central America deal with the youth gang issue. I applaud this meeting and the State Department's initiative and encourage Central American countries to go beyond a police-based approach and address the social roots of violent crime.

With passage of the important measure today, the United States Congress will recognize that violence poses an increasingly serious threat to peace and stability in Central America. This resolution encourages Central American and U.S. officials to meet on a regular basis to enhance further cooperation in curbing violence in the region.

The measure also recognizes the U.S. has a commitment of \$4 million to tackle this problem, and that is a welcome start. But, importantly, this resolution notes that greater resources should be considered in the future to fight the problem of violence in Central America.

Our friends in Central America are great and close allies, and we should do everything we can to bring stability to these societies and to end excessive violence. That is why I urge all Members to support this resolution.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. POE. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself as much time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support today of H. Res. 564 and join my colleagues in recognizing the efforts taken by the United States and seven Central American countries to confront gang violence in Central America.

The tragic nature of gang violence in Central America threatens the peace and stability of its neighbors to the north and to the south. Geographically located between the world's largest drug-producing and drug-consuming countries, Central America faces a seemingly insurmountable problem when forced to counter gang violence on its own.

For this reason, I was pleased to see that earlier this year, the United States and seven Central American countries took the first step towards finding an international solution to the growing level of violence in Central America by holding the first-ever dialogue on democratic security in Guatemala City.

As the transnational nature of gangs causes crime and violence in Central America to bleed into the United States, this resolution recognizes the importance of a continuing United States involvement and commitment of funds towards dealing with youth gangs in Central America.

Gangs have become more organized, more violent, and affect North America, Central America and South America. It also encourages Central America and U.S. officials to meet on a regular basis for further cooperation in combating crime and violence and commends these countries for taking the first step in the struggle for security by developing the United States' strategy to combat criminal gangs from Central America and Mexico.

While I am pleased to see the progress made this year, I also recognize the grave importance of sustaining these efforts while increasing our understanding of the roots of this epidemic. I look forward to our continued cooperation with our neighbors to the south and once again applaud the efforts already taken to counter this increasing threat to peace and security in our region.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. SHERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to one of the co-authors of this legislation, the chairman of the Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Mr. ENGEL.

Mr. ENGEL. I thank my friend from California.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of my House Resolution 564, which brings attention to the serious

and growing problem of violence in Central America.

I first want to thank my colleague and the ranking member on the Western Hemisphere Subcommittee, Dan Burton, for introducing this resolution with me. I also want to thank Chairman LANTOS and Ranking Member ROSLEHTINEN for their support of this bill.

The February murder of three Salvadoran legislators in the Central American Parliament and the subsequent shocking murder in prison of the Guatemalan policeman linked to the crime illustrate the very real daily threat posed by violence in Central America. While this high-profile incident brought violence in Central America to a spotlight, it is, unfortunately, nothing new.

Homicide rates in El Salvador and Guatemala are higher today than they were in those countries' civil wars. According to government statistics, Guatemala's murder rate has doubled since 1999.

As chairman of the Western Hemisphere Subcommittee of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, I focus intently on violence in Central America and the roots of this violence. At a recent hearing that I chaired on this topic, I was taken aback by the major role that drug trafficking plays in encouraging violence in the sub-region.

Ninety percent of the cocaine shipped from the Andean region to the United States flows through Central America. The sub-region's location between the highest drug-consuming and the highest drug-producing regions of the world make it particularly vulnerable. Unfortunately, we are the highest drug-consuming portion of that equation.

If drugs are the primary factor in this scourge of violence, youth gangs are a close second. The U.S. Southern Command has estimated that there are 70,000 gang members in Central America alone. Fortunately, we are beginning to address this crisis. The United States and Central American officials have started to work together to combat violence in Central America; but, obviously, much more needs to be done.

This resolution recognizes the recent progress that has been made in enhancing U.S.-Central American cooperation and combating violence in Central America. The seven countries of Central America, the Dominican Republic and the United States held its first-ever dialogue on democratic security in Guatemala City this July. That meeting was the first time in almost a quarter century that high-level officials from the United States and all of these countries met formally to discuss security issues.

At this meeting, Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, Tom Shannon, announced that the U.S. strategy to combat criminal gangs from Central America and Mexico was beginning. The United States also pledged \$4 million in assistance to help Central Americans begin to address this issue.

This resolution commends U.S. and Central American officials for their joint efforts to combat violence and encourages greater cooperation in the future. In the coming days, the Bush administration will present Congress with a plan to assist Mexico and Central America in dealing with issues of crime and violence, particularly as they relate to counternarcotics.

I look forward to working with my colleagues from the State Department and Central America as we begin to shape a future assistance package that will address violence in Central America.

Finally, I want to point to one area of progress that we have seen since this resolution was first introduced in July.

On August 1, Guatemala's legislature approved the international commission against impunity. This is a groundbreaking agreement between the Guatemalan Government and the United Nations to combat impunity in Guatemala. It is a major step for all of us who care so deeply about curbing violence in Central America, and I want to congratulate my colleagues in the Guatemalan Congress and the executive branch on this major accomplishment.

Let me say in closing that one of the things I have noticed as chairman is the feeling of neglect in the hemisphere that the other nations feel that the United States is not concentrating on this region, that we are looking elsewhere in the world. I think that this resolution and what we are doing goes a long way in combating that feeling.

I urge my colleagues to support House Resolution 564.

Mr. POE. Mr. Speaker, I want to commend Mr. ENGEL, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. SHERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. SHERMAN) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the resolution, H. Res. 564, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the resolution, as amended, was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

CONDEMNING THE PERSECUTION OF LABOR RIGHTS ADVOCATES IN IRAN

Mr. SHERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 203) condemning the persecution of labor rights advocates in Iran, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the concurrent resolution.

The text of the concurrent resolution is as follows:

H. CON. RES. 203

Whereas Iran, in violation of ILO principles, refuses to recognize independent labor unions;

Whereas, on April 9, 2007, Iranian agents arrested and imprisoned Mahmoud Salehi, founder of the Saghez Bakery Workers Association, a labor union that is independent and therefore not recognized under Iranian law;

Whereas Salehi's life is in grave danger as he sits in the Sanandaj prisons without access to kidney dialysis treatment;

Whereas, on July 10, 2007, plainclothes Iranian agents severely beat and arrested Mansour Osanloo, president of the Syndicate of Bus Drivers of the Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company, another labor union that is independent and therefore not recognized under Iranian law;

Whereas this arrest was the third time in less than two years that Syndicate president Osanloo has been arrested by Iranian agents;

Whereas Osanloo now sits in Iran's notorious Evin prison with a chronic heart condition and a serious eye condition that requires immediate surgery;

Whereas Osanloo has no access to medical or legal assistance and no contact with his family; and

Whereas, on August 9, 2007, the International Transport Workers' Federation, together with the International Trade Union Confederation, staged an international "day of action" to free Osanloo and Salehi: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring), That Congress—

(1) condemns the Iranian regime for the arrest and imprisonment of Iranian union leaders Mahmoud Salehi and Mansour Osanloo and demands their immediate release;

(2) expresses its solidarity with the workers of Iran and stands with them, and with all Iranians, in their efforts to bring political freedom and individual liberty to Iran; and

(3) calls on the Iranian regime to respect the right of Iranian workers to form independent associations and unions, as required by its membership in the ILO.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. SHERMAN) and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. POE) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. SHERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the resolution under consideration.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from California?

There was no objection.

Mr. SHERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of this resolution and yield myself such time as I may consume.

I would like to thank our colleagues, Mr. KIRK from Illinois, Mr. ANDREWS from New Jersey, for introducing this important and timely legislation.

Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons in support of terrorism and its abuse of the human rights of its own people collectively form one of the most serious threats to peace and freedom faced by our country and faced by the world. It speaks volumes that Iran is a member of the International Labor Organization and formally subscribes to the core ILO principles like freedom of association, yet continues to jail those who attempt to form independent labor unions.

The mistreatment of two courageous labor leaders, Mr. Mahmoud Salehi and Mansour Osanloo, is yet another example of the unacceptable behavior of the regime in Iran.

Since 2004, Mahmoud Salehi, who comes from the Kurdish region of Iran, has been jailed on trumped-up charges for the crime of trying to organize a May Day rally in his own city. Unlike many well-known Iranian dissidents, Mr. Salehi is not a writer or a professor or even a politician. He is an ordinary man, a baker by trade, who has had the courage to stand up for the rights of working people. Since April 19 of this year, he has been imprisoned and denied access to the dialysis treatments he requires.

The same is true of Mansour Osanloo, who fell afoul of the regime for threatening in 2006 to lead his fellow bus drivers in Tehran out on strike. Mr. Osanloo was kidnapped from his bus by unknown parties and severely beaten. He too is now being held on vaguely worded charges.

It is appropriate and necessary for the United States House of Representatives to condemn the brutal mistreatment of these leaders and call for their immediate release.

I strongly support this resolution, and I encourage all my colleagues to do likewise.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. POE. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the author of this measure, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. KIRK).

Mr. KIRK. Mr. Speaker, this resolution before us demonstrates America's commitment to human rights around the world. As the cochair of the Iran Working Group and a member of the Human Rights Caucus, I am proud to stand here as the co-author of this Kirk-Andrews resolution.

On April 9, 2007, Iranian agents arrested and imprisoned Mahmoud Salehi, the founder of the Saghez Bakery Workers Association. Mr. Salehi is a kidney patient who now sits in the Sanandaj prisons, his life in grave danger as the regime blocks his access to dialysis treatment.

July 10, plain-clothed Iranian agents severely beat and arrested Mansour Osanloo, the president of the Syndicate of Bus Drivers of the Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company. Osanloo now sits in Iran's notorious Evin prison with a chronic heart condition, no access to medical or legal assistance, and no contact with his family. The Teamsters have called on Iran to immediately release both men.

In August, the International Trade Union Confederation, together with the International Transport Workers Federation, staged an international "day of action" to free these union leaders; and now it's our turn. Together with my good friend and the cochair of the Iran Working Group, Congressman ROBERT ANDREWS of New Jersey, we introduced this resolution, a bipartisan